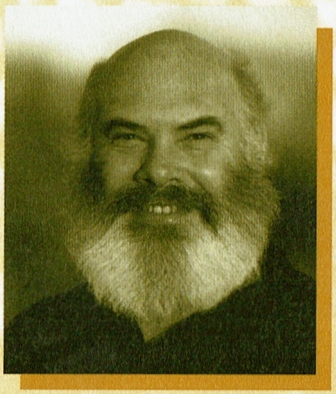
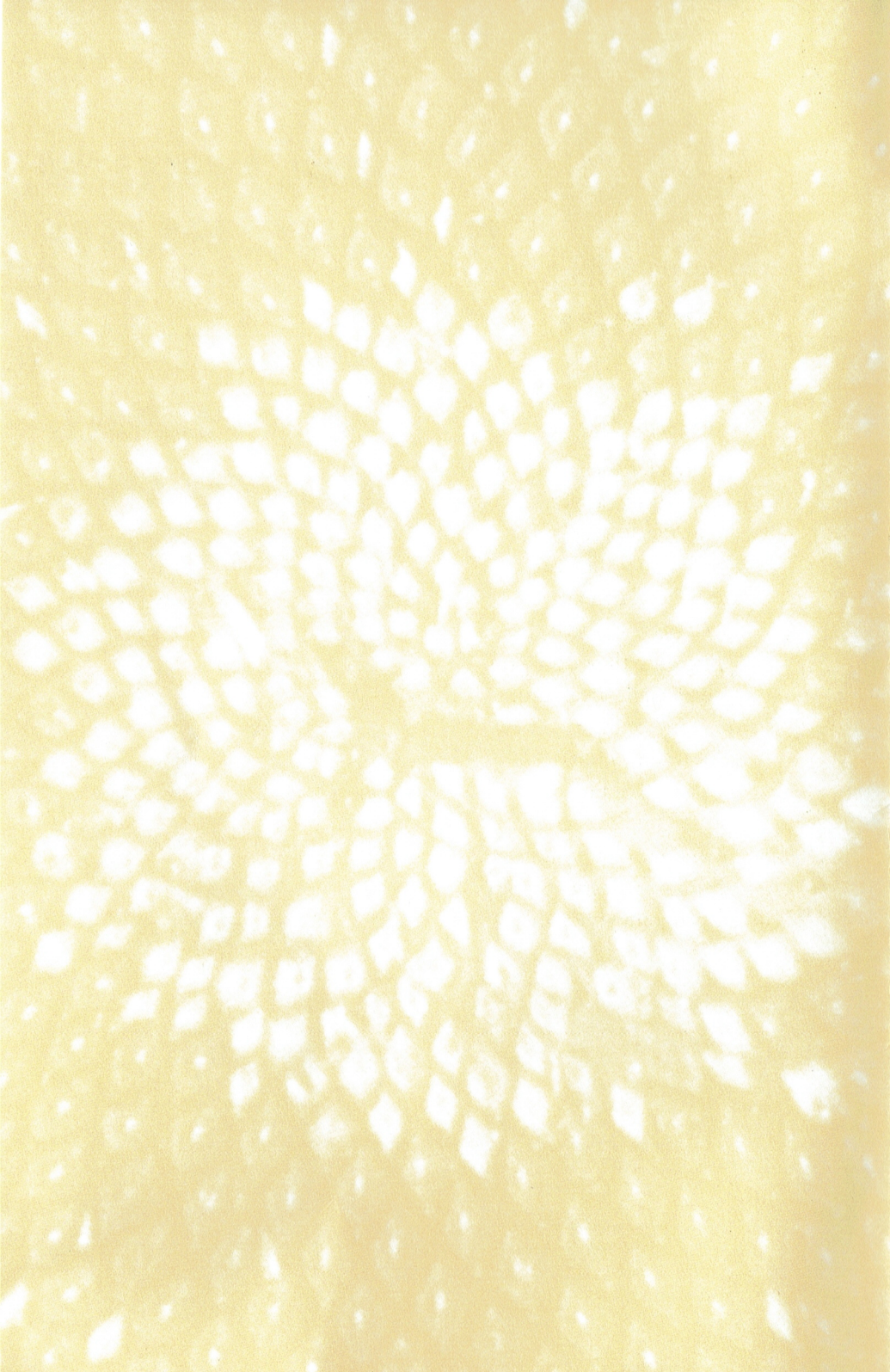
DR. WEIL'S 8 WEEK PLAN

—for—

OPTIMAL HEALING POWER

BY ANDREW WEIL, M.D.

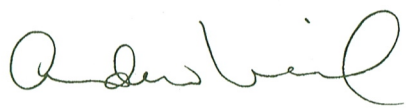




An Eight-Week Plan for
OPTIMAL HEALING POWER

Dear Reader,

A healthy lifestyle is the cornerstone of natural health and the best way to ensure that your body's healing system functions optimally. In my medical practice I often suggest to patients that they make changes in how they eat, exercise, and handle stress, but I am well aware of how difficult it is to change long-standing habits. Even people who know that their lifestyles need improvement may fail to act because they don't know where to begin. In this booklet I outline an eight-week program, designed to build a solid foundation for the kind of lifestyle I believe will protect and enhance your natural healing ability. The program starts slowly, each week's suggestions building on what you have done in the previous week. If it seems to move along too fast for you, do not hesitate to slow down and move at your own pace. After two months you will have changed your lifestyle significantly and can then decide how much of the program you want to follow on a regular basis.



Andrew Weil, M.D.

Adapted from *Spontaneous Healing: How to Discover and Enhance Your Body's Natural Ability to Maintain and Heal Itself*, by Andrew Weil, M.D. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995).

WEEK One

PROJECTS

- *Go through your pantry and refrigerator and remove all oils other than olive oil.* Get rid of any margarine, solid vegetable shortenings, and products made with them. Read labels of all food products so that you can dispose of any containing partially hydrogenated oils. All of these fats are unhealthy in one way or another. If you do not have any extra-virgin olive oil on hand, buy a bottle and start using it. If you want a neutral-tasting oil, buy a small bottle of organic canola oil from the health food store. Keep your oils in the refrigerator to retard oxidation and prevent them from becoming rancid.

DIET

- *Start eating some fresh broccoli this week.* If you do not have a favorite way of preparing it, try the following simple recipe.

Broccoli with Garlic

1 large bunch broccoli

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

salt to taste

several cloves of garlic, chopped or mashed

Trim the end off a large bunch of broccoli. Cut off the main stem, peel it beneath the fibrous layer, and cut into bite-size chunks. Separate the head of broccoli into bite-size pieces and peel a bit of the skin from the stems to make them more tender. Wash the broccoli and place it in a pot with 1/4 cup of cold water, 1 tablespoon of extra-virgin olive oil, salt to taste, and several cloves of chopped or mashed garlic. Bring to a boil, cover tightly, and let steam until the broccoli is bright green and very crunchy-tender, no more than five minutes. Remove the lid and boil off most of the remaining liquid. Serve at once. You can mix this with cooked pasta (penne or rigatoni), season it with red pepper flakes and Parmesan cheese, or eat as is. It is beautiful to look at, utterly delicious, low in fat, rich in vitamins and minerals, and full of natural anticancer agents. Serves 2 to 4.

- *Eat salmon, sardines, or kippers at least once this week to increase your intake of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.* If you do not like fish, buy some flax seeds at a health food store, grind them, and sprinkle them over some of your food. One to two tablespoons a day of ground flax seeds will give you a good dose of omega-3s.

SUPPLEMENTS

- *Start taking vitamin C if you do not do so already.* Take 100 milligrams twice a day.

EXERCISE

- *Try to walk ten minutes a day, five days out of this week.* If you are already on a program of aerobic exercise other than walking, do the walking in addition to your regular program.

MENTAL / SPIRITUAL

- *Think about your own experiences of healing.* Make a list of illnesses, injuries, or problems you have recovered from in the past two years. Note anything you did to speed the healing process.
- *Practice observing your breath for five minutes every day.* Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed, loosening any tight clothing. Focus your attention on your breathing without trying to influence it in any way. Follow the contours of the cycle through inhalation and exhalation and see if you can perceive the points at which one phase changes into the other. Your goal is simply to keep your attention on the breath cycle and observe. No matter how the breath changes, even if the diversions become very small, just continue to follow your breathing. This is a basic form of meditation, a relaxation method, and a way to harmonize body, mind, and spirit.
- *Bring some flowers into your home* and keep them where you can enjoy them.

WEEK TWO

PROJECTS

- *Find out where your drinking water comes from if you do not know and what impurities it might contain.* Stop drinking chlorinated water. If you do not already have a water-purifying system for your home, get information on one (distillers are best but expensive; reverse osmosis systems are good and much more affordable). In the meantime, buy bottled water — in bottles made of glass or hard, clear plastic, not the soft, translucent variety, which dissolves into the water.

DIET

- *Go to a natural food store* and look through the frozen and refrigerated sections to familiarize yourself with the many different products made from soybeans. Select one to try. Soy foods provide protection against cancer, especially cancer of the male and female reproductive systems.
- *Buy some Japanese green tea and try it.* If you drink coffee or black tea, try to substitute green tea for some or all of your usual beverage. Green tea contains substances (catechins) that lower cholesterol and protect against cancer. It is the most healthful of the caffeinated beverages.
- *Eat fish at least once this week.* Here is a unique, easy way to prepare fish that keeps it moist and delicately flavored without adding any fat.

Steamed Fish

2 fresh fillets of fish, cut into single portions
1 onion, sliced thin
1 carrot, peeled and sliced thin
1 lemon, sliced thin
1-inch piece of fresh ginger, sliced
lettuce leaves
salt

Wash fish under running water, then shake off excess water. Prepare sheets of aluminum foil big enough to wrap around portions of fish. On each sheet place a lettuce leaf and then a portion of fish. Season fish with salt. Top fish with a lemon slice, two slices of ginger, and a few slices of onion and carrot. Enclose in foil, forming a sealed packet. Place packets in a steamer and steam over boiling water for 10 minutes (or more, depending on the thickness of the fish; cut apart one portion to check for doneness). Place a packet on each plate or remove fish from foil, scraping off vegetables before serving. Serves 2 to 4.

SUPPLEMENTS

- *Start taking a mixed carotene supplement, 25,000 IU a day with breakfast.* Look for new products that provide mixed carotenoids such as beta-carotene, lutein, and lycopene.

EXERCISE

- *Increase your daily walk to fifteen minutes* and try to do it five days during this week.

MENTAL / SPIRITUAL

- *Pay attention to your mental imagery* and make a few notes on kinds of images that have strong emotional impact for you. Think about how you might adapt them for use in healing visualizations.
- *Visit a park or some other favorite place in nature.* Spend as much time as you can there, doing nothing in particular, just feeling the energy of the place.
- *Try a one-day "news fast."* Do not read, watch, or listen to any news for a day and see how you feel.
- *In addition to observing your breathing, begin to practice this relaxing breathing exercise:*

1. Place the tip of the tongue against the back of your upper front teeth, then slide it just above the teeth until it rests on the alveolar ridge, the soft tissue between the teeth and the roof of the mouth. Keep it there during the whole exercise.
2. Exhale completely through your mouth, making an audible whoosh sound.
3. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose for a (silent) count of four.
4. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
5. Exhale audibly through your mouth for a count of eight.
6. Repeat for a total of four cycles, then breathe normally.

If you have difficulty exhaling with your tongue in place, try pursing your lips; you will soon get the knack of it. Note that the speed with which you do the exercise is unimportant. What is important is the ratio of four to seven to eight counts as you inhale, hold, and exhale. You will be limited by how long you can comfortably hold your breath, so adjust your counting accordingly. As you practice this exercise, you will be able to slow it down, which is desirable. Do the exercise twice a day without fail.

WEEK Three

PROJECTS

- *Find out where you can buy organic produce.* Inquire in grocery and health food stores. Make a commitment to buy organically produced fruits and vegetables, especially the ones that are most likely to be contaminated with pesticides and other agricultural chemicals: apples, peaches, grapes (and raisins), oranges, strawberries, potatoes, carrots, lettuce, green beans, peanuts, and wheat (including flour and products made from wheat flour).
- *Take steps to protect yourself from toxic forms of energy.* If you use an electric blanket, stop. Remove electric clock radios from the vicinity of your bed. Buy a radiation shield for the video display of your computer. Buy a pair of UV-protective sunglasses if you do not have any.

DIET

- *Start eating fish* at least twice this week.
- *Replace at least one serving of meat* with a soy food of your choice.
- *Make a conscious effort to eat extra servings of fruits and vegetables* with at least one meal this week. The following recipe works well either as a side dish or as an entrée served over noodles.

Braised Red Cabbage

1 large head red cabbage
1 large onion
2 large carrots
1 large green apple
1 tablespoon olive oil
3 cloves garlic, peeled and mashed
1 small bay leaf
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
2 tablespoons light brown sugar
¼ cup red wine vinegar
1½ cups dry red wine
salt and pepper

Peel and slice onion. Peel and slice carrots into rounds. Remove and discard outermost leaves of cabbage, cut head into quarters, remove the core, and slice each quarter into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Peel and core apple and cut into dice. Heat olive oil in heavy saucepan, add onion and carrot, and cook over medium heat, stirring, until onion is translucent. Add cabbage and apple and toss well. Add all remaining ingredients. Bring to low boil, cover, and cook about 1 hour. Remove bay leaf, correct seasoning, and serve. Serves 4.

SUPPLEMENTS

- *With lunch or your largest meal take 400 to 800 IU of vitamin E* (the lower dose if you are under 40, the larger if you are over 40) together with 200 to 300 micrograms of selenium. Use only a natural form of vitamin E (d-alpha-tocopherol), not a synthetic one (dl-alpha-tocopherol).

  Vitamin E is a powerful, nontoxic antioxidant—a substance that protects tissues by neutralizing harmful free radicals that might otherwise increase your risk of cancer and other diseases. Although vitamin E is naturally present in grains and seeds, it is impossible to get large enough amounts from dietary sources to give the kind of protection needed against the toxins we breathe and take into our bodies in other ways. Since vitamin E is fat-soluble, it must be taken with a meal to be absorbed.

  Selenium is a trace mineral with antioxidant and anticancer properties. Selenium and vitamin E facilitate each other's absorption, so the two should be taken together, whereas vitamin C may interfere with the absorption of some forms of selenium and should be taken separately. I used to recommend daily doses of 50 to 100 mcg of selenium, but ongoing research on its cancer-protective value suggests that the higher doses of 200 to 300 mcg are more effective (those of you with any increased cancer risk should take the higher amount). Doses above 400 mcg a day may not be healthy.

EXERCISE

- *Increase your daily walk to twenty minutes, five days out of the week.* If you do other aerobic exercise, consider cutting that down to two or three days and substituting an aerobic walk on the other days.

MENTAL / SPIRITUAL

- *Make a list of inspirational books you would like to read* in the areas of spirituality, religion, self-help, poetry, biography, or any other category, and select one that you will begin this week.
- *Make a list of friends and acquaintances in whose company you feel more alive, happier, more optimistic.* Pick one whom you will spend some time with this week.
- *Buy or pick more flowers.*

WEEK Four

PROJECTS

- *Check on your bed, mattress, and sleeping location.* Is an uncomfortable bed or noisy bedroom interfering with restful sleep? If so, consider making appropriate changes.
- *Find out about getting an air filter for your home or bedroom* if you live in a polluted area.

DIET

- *Try to replace another meal of animal protein with soy protein.*
- *Begin eating some more garlic* this week in any form that appeals to you. The following "Spinach and Garlic" recipe is one of my favorites.

Spinach and Garlic

1 lb. fresh spinach
1 tablespoon olive oil
4 cloves garlic, minced
red pepper flakes (optional)
salt

Wash spinach well; shake off excess water but do not dry. Remove coarse stems. If leaves are very large, cut them into smaller pieces. Heat olive oil in a heavy saucepan and add the minced garlic and a pinch of red pepper flakes if desired. Stir over medium high heat for 1 minute, then add the wet spinach and salt to taste. Stir well to coat spinach with oil and garlic, then cover and steam just until spinach is completely wilted and bright green. Do not overcook. Stir well and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

EXERCISE

- *Increase your aerobic walk to twenty-five minutes*, five days out of the week.

MENTAL / SPIRITUAL

- *Try to do two days of news-fasting this week.*
- *Continue to practice the breathing exercises.* Make sure you do the relaxing breathing exercise twice a day.
- *Contact someone you know who has experienced healing or recovery from illness or injury.* Ask for details of the experience.

WEEK Five

PROJECTS

- *Locate a steam bath or sauna that you can use.* Use it for up to twenty minutes one day. It should be hot enough to make you sweat freely; be sure to drink plenty of pure water to replace lost fluid.

DIET

- *Try a one-day fruit fast*, eating as much fresh fruit as you like but nothing else except water and herbal tea. Take vitamin C but skip the other supplements on this fasting day.
- *Buy a piece of fresh ginger root and make yourself some ginger tea.* Put one half-teaspoon of the freshly grated root into a cup of boiling water in a pot. Cover the pot and steep for ten to fifteen minutes. Strain, add honey to taste, and drink hot or iced.
- *Cut back on your fat intake* by substituting a low-fat dish such as the following for an otherwise fatty favorite.

Oven-Fried Potatoes

3 medium unpeeled baking potatoes (about 1½ lbs., organic if possible)
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons olive oil
1½ teaspoons fresh or dried rosemary, chopped fine
¼ teaspoon salt
2 cloves garlic, mashed
vegetable cooking spray

Scrub potatoes and cut each lengthwise into 8 wedges. Combine lemon juice and next 5 ingredients in a large bowl. Add potatoes and toss well to coat. Place skin-side down on a baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Bake in preheated 400° oven for 45 minutes or until tender and lightly browned. Serves 6.

EXERCISE

- Increase your aerobic walk to thirty minutes, five days out of the week.

DIET

- *See if you can extend your news fast* to three days this week.
- *Listen to a piece of music* that you find inspirational and uplifting.
- *Bring more flowers* into your home.

WEEK Six

PROJECTS

- *See if you can uncover any other stories of healing* in your circle of friends, acquaintances, and business associates.
- *Take a steam bath or sauna* twice this week.

DIET

- *Try a one-day juice fast today.* Drink any amount of fresh fruit and vegetable juices, plus water and herbal tea. Take vitamin C but skip the other supplements on the fasting day.
- *Eat broccoli* at least two times this week.
- *Continue to eat fish and soy foods.* The following recipe for grilled salmon is tasty and healthful.

Grilled Salmon

1 large fresh salmon fillet

fresh ginger, peeled and coarsely grated

natural Japanese soy sauce (shoyu or tamari; low-sodium is fine)

sake

light brown sugar

garlic

roasted (dark) sesame oil

Prepare a marinade by mixing equal parts of sake and soy sauce. For each cup of liquid add 1 1/2 tablespoons of brown sugar, 1 tablespoon of grated ginger, 1 clove of garlic, mashed, and a few drops of dark sesame oil. Stir until the sugar dissolves. With the salmon fillet under running water, shake off excess, and place the fillet in a shallow dish. Pour marinade over, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (no more than 4), spooning marinade over fish from time to time. When the grill is hot, remove fish from marinade and place skin-side up over heat. When fish is cooked halfway, turn and finish cooking, skin-side down, until done. Do not overcook. Serves 2 to 3.

SUPPLEMENTS

- *Try a tonic herb.* Tonics are natural products that strengthen or invigorate the healing system—the word tonic derives from a Greek word meaning "stretch." Tonics stretch or tone your system in the way physical exercise tones your muscles. Although many practitioners of conventional Western medicine consider tonic medicines to be of low repute—they prefer magic bullets—alternative healers, especially practitioners of traditional medicine in the East, hold tonics in high esteem. Increasingly, patients are willing to pay large sums for natural products believed to augment internal resilience and resistance. As medical researchers document tonics' safety and effectiveness, I predict that doctors here will begin to prescribe them more.

  I use and recommend a number of tonics. A few of the most familiar of these are herbs I've already mentioned: garlic, ginger, and green tea. Another useful tonic product is ginseng, obtained from a species in the genus Panax, whose name comes from the same root as panacea, that is, "all-heal." Used regularly, it may increase energy in chronically ill patients and those who are debilitated or lacking in vitality.

  For more information on these and other tonics, you might read Chapter 11, "Using Tonics," in my book *Spontaneous Healing* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). After looking over this information, decide which tonic is most appropriate for you and find out where to get it (most natural food stores carry the most-popular tonics).

EXERCISE

- *Increase your aerobic walk to thirty-five minutes,* five days out of the week.

MENTAL / SPIRITUAL

- *Extend your news fast* to four days.
- *Visit an art museum* or view some work of art, sculpture, or architecture that you find beautiful and inspiring.
- *Continue the breathing exercises* every day.

WEEK Seven

PROJECTS

- *Think about some kind of service work* that you could do this week, such as volunteering for a few hours at a hospital or charitable organization or helping someone you know who is disabled or shut-in—any activity in which you give some of your time and energy to help others.
- *Continue the steam baths or saunas*, three times a week if possible.

DIET

- *For your fast day this week, drink only fruit juice, water, and herbal tea.* Take vitamin C but skip the other supplements on the fasting day.
- *Continue to eat fish and soy foods.* Prepare at least two meals of fish and two of soy protein; and eat generous servings of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, ginger, and garlic. The following is a beautiful and filling soup that gives you a generous helping of nutrients (particularly carotenes) and flavor.

Carrot Soup

1 lb. carrots
1 medium potato
1 onion
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon dried chervil or parsley
3 cups vegetable stock (or 3 cups water and enough instant-vegetable-broth powder to make an equivalent)
juice of 1 orange
salt and pepper
chopped scallion for garnish

Peel and slice carrots into thin rounds. Peel and dice potato. Peel and chop onion coarsely. Heat oil in a large saucepan, add vegetables and the parsley or chervil, and cook over medium heat for 5 minutes, stirring, without letting vegetables brown. Add the stock or broth, heat to boiling, cover, lower heat, and simmer for 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Allow to cool a little and use a food processor or blender to liquefy the soup. Add the orange juice and salt and pepper to taste. Heat to serving temperature and serve garnished with chopped scallion. Serves 4.

EXERCISE

- *Increase the aerobic walk to forty-five minutes,* five days out of the week. In my opinion, walking is the most healthful form of physical activity, the one that has the greatest capacity to keep the healing system in good working order and increase the likelihood of spontaneous healing in cases of illness.

  The advantages of walking over all other forms of exercise are numerous. You do not have to learn how to do it. It does not require any equipment except a comfortable pair of shoes. It costs nothing, and you can do it anywhere: in cities, parks, even indoors in shopping malls if the weather is inclement. The chance of injuring yourself is small, in great contrast to running and competitive sports. It is much less boring than riding a stationary bike or running on a treadmill. You can walk outdoors and enjoy the beauty of nature. You can also walk with friends and enjoy their company.

  I have experimented with many forms of exercise in my life, and I keep coming back to walking as the best. As I get older, I think it will be the one I rely on to keep my body, mind, and healing system all in good shape.

MENTAL / SPIRITUAL

- *Reach out and resume connection with someone* from whom you are estranged. In some way, our spiritual selves resonate with others; if the interaction is positive, human connectedness is a most powerful healer, capable of neutralizing many harmful influences on the material plane.
- *Make time for flowers, music, and art,* because beauty in any form has a salutary effect on spirit. You can also read the writings or life stories of men and women of high spiritual attainment.
- *Increase the relaxing breath* to eight cycles, twice a day.

WEEK Eight

PROJECTS

- *Review the changes you have made in your lifestyle* in the past eight weeks and think about how many of them you wish to make permanent.

DIET

- *Try a one-day water fast this week.* You can have herbal tea with lemon if you like, but nothing caloric. If this proves too difficult, drink some diluted fruit juice. Take vitamin C but skip the other supplements.
- *Think about how you can continue the dietary changes* of this program in coming weeks. For example, here is the house dressing we use at my home—utterly simple, quick, and delicious, with a fraction of the fat and calories of typical dressings.

Low-Fat Salad Dressing

Pour seasoned rice vinegar over salad greens and toss to coat well. Sprinkle with drops of roasted (dark) sesame oil, toss, and serve. (My favorite brand of seasoned rice vinegar is Marukan, which is available in Japanese and Asian grocery stores as well as the Asian-foods sections of some supermarkets and natural food stores. You will find dark sesame oil in the same locations; keep it in the refrigerator after opening.) For variety, add a clove of mashed garlic to the vinegar before pouring it on.

SUPPLEMENTS

- *Start taking your tonic.* Make a commitment to give it a two-month trial to see what it does for your energy level, resistance, and outlook.

EXERCISE

- *Reach your goal of a forty-five minute walk*, five days out of the week.

- *Continue the breathing exercises.* Start using the relaxing breath whenever you feel anxious or upset, and be sure to do it at least twice a day.
- *Try to maintain your news fast* for the whole week. At the end of the week, think about how much news you want to let back into your life in coming weeks. I've found that news is a major source of my own mental turmoil. The percentage of stories in the news that make me feel good is very small; the percentage of stories that make me feel anxious or outraged is very large and increasing, as news media focus more and more on murder, mayhem, and misery. It is easy to forget that we have a choice as to whether we let this information into our minds and thoughts. If you're like me, you will have found that your news fasts allow you to get better rest and sleep.
- *Think of people who have hurt you or made you angry.* Try to bring yourself to understand their actions and forgive them. Can you express forgiveness to at least one of them?
- *Reward yourself with especially beautiful flowers* for completing this program, and buy some flowers for someone else.

Congratulations!

I have asked you to do a lot in the past two months, some of it unfamiliar and challenging. Know that you have been very good to yourself and your healing system. As a result of the changes you have made, you have a greater chance of experiencing spontaneous healing if the need for it arises. Try to incorporate into your life as many of these steps as you can from now on.

Andrew Weil, M.D.